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"SAINT GEORGE OF MERRIE ENGLONE."

IV.

WE left the Redcross Knight riding cheerily upon his way, accompanied by the gay and false Fidessa. They had travelled long, when at last they came in sight of a goodly building that seemed to be the house of a prince; and a broad highway led to it, worn bare by the thronging of many feet. Troops of people of all classes and from every land travelled thither continually, but few of these lived to return, and they who did were to be seen, outcasts in the hedges, for they had escaped from this great house only with beggary and disgrace.

Towards this stately palace Fidessa led the Knight, who could not but admire its lofty towers, fair windows and delightful borders; though the high walls were but slight; it seemed strange that so vast a building should rest upon no better foundation than a shifting sand hill.

Arrived there, they went straight in, for all the gates stood open, and they passed through the hall, which was bright with costly hangings and rich carpets, and where were gathered many people waiting to see the lady of the palace. As they passed into the presence chamber the furnishing became even more gorgeous and costly, while groups of noble lords and ladies added to the splendour of the place. High above all a cloth of state was spread, and a rich throne, on which there sat a maiden Queen in royal robes, bright with gold and precious stones, but brighter far in her own beauty. Under her feet lay a dragon, with a hideous train, and in her hand she held a mirror wherein she often viewed her own fair face. Proud Lucifera, men called her, and she ruled her realm, not by wise laws, but by the evil counsels of six ancient wizards.

A gentle usher, Vanity by name, led the knight and Fidessa into the presence, and when they had reached the lowest step of the Queen's high throne, they made obeisance on humble knee, and said that they had come from far to see her royal state; to which lowly salutation she returned no more than

half disdainful thanks. All this while her lords and ladies were trying to attract the notice of the strangers, each seeking to outshine the rest in gay attire, stiff ruff, or well curled hair. They all did their best to entertain their visitors, and were most glad to see Fidessa, who was their old companion; but the knight did not think much of all this display, nor did he honour the proud Princess, who was so little gracious to her guests.

Then, all at once, the Queen arose from her throne and called for her coach; and the people thronged to see her pass, so gorgeously arrayed, and so beautiful withal, as she climbed into her rich gilt coach. But the strangest sight was the six unequal beasts which drew the royal coach, and the six sage counsellors of the Queen which did ride thereon. The first of these, who guided all the rest, was sluggish Idleness, the nurse of sin, who chose to ride upon a slothful ass: scarce could he hold up his heavy head to look whether it was night or day, so drowned was he in sleep; and a bad guide was he for the royal carriage, seeing that he did not know whether he went right or wrong. No worldly cares would he take on himself, and no manly exercise did he follow; yet spent his life in lawless riot, which brought upon him such grievous malady, that his limbs shook as if he were in an ague fit.

By his side rode loathsome Gluttony, a deformed creature mounted on a filthy sow: even as he rode he was eating, and in his hand he carried a drinking can, which went so often to his mouth that his drunken body hardly kept its seat: in shape and life he was more like a monster than a man. So drowned was his mind in meat and drink that he was unfit for any worldly thing, and seldom knew friend from foe, while his wretched body was full of disease, which grew worse day by day through over-feeding.

Greedy Avarice rode beside him upon a camel loaded with gold: he wore a thread-bare coat and cobbled shoes, and his lean body looked as if he never tasted a good morsel, for he spared both from back and belly to fill his bags, for he made his god of his wicked pelf, and sold himself to hell for money.

Next to him, malicious Envy came upon a ravenous wolf: he chewed a venomous toad between his rotten teeth, and inwardly, he chewed his wrath whenever he heard of any

good thing happening to another; but if news of other folks misfortune came, then he waxed merry. He was clothed in a dull colourless garment, painted full of eyes, and in his bosom there lay a snake with mortal sting. He hated all good works and virtuous deeds, and was ever ready to backbite those who showed themselves better or more clever than himself.

Last of the six, fierce revenging Wrath came, mounted on a lion: he brandished a burning brand about his head, and his eyes seemed to send forth sparks as fiery. He held a dagger in his hand, trembling with hasty rage; and his rough raiment was stained with blood he had shed, for he had not power over his hands in his furious fits; but when they were over, he would often repent of the evil he had wrought. And many are the ills which follow cruel Wrath—bloodshed, and tumultuous strife, unmanly murder, bitter spite and fretting grief, and upon himself madness and the shaking palsy.

Satan himself rode as coachman upon the beam of the waggon, and lashed his team with a smarting whip; and wherever they came, a foggy mist covered the land; and scattered under their feet lay skulls and ribs of men whose life had gone astray.

Forth went this strange cavalcade to sport in the fields, Fidessa having her seat next to the chair of proud Lucifera: but that good Knight kept himself apart from sports so little beseeming a warrior. On their return they found arrived a fierce and lawless knight, upon whose shield "Sans Joy" was written in red letters. This was no other than the brother of Sans Foy, and he had come hither in search of the knight who had slain his elder brother: so the Redcross Knight had to do battle with Sans Joy, in the presence of the Queen and her court; a long and stout conflict it was, and, in the end, Sans Joy fell, covered with many wounds; and all the people greeted the victor with great shouting and clapping of hands. He, too, was wounded, and was carried home and laid on a sumptuous bed, while many skilful doctors attended to heal his hurts.

In this palace of pleasures, Gluttony served the supper, and Idleness was the chamberlain, wherefore the Queen and her courtiers slept soundly far on into the day; and so it happened

that when Fidessa came to see how the knight did, she found him gone, though his gaping wounds were in ill condition to ride. He had hastened away with good cause; for his watchful dwarf had found out a dungeon wherein lay many captive wretches, and these had told him the cause of their great misery; through wasteful pride and wanton riot had they mortgaged their lives, and now were condemned to dwell in this dungeon. Many were there whose names are famous in the history of the world, women as well as men, besides the crowds of common folk which day by day assembled here from all the world.

Now when the faithful dwarf had told his master of this woful sight, he would no longer stay there in peril of such a fate; but, rising before dawn, he escaped by a postern gate that he might not be seen, for no doubt death would have been his fate had he been overtaken. So foul was the way with the carcasses of dead men which had been cast out of that great house of Pride without even decent burial, that scarcely could he find a footing, and so made good his escape before the house should be astir.

V.

When Fidessa found that the Redcross Knight had gone, forth she went to seek him far and wide, and before long she came upon him sitting weary by a well, and for greater ease he had taken off his coat of steel and laid it by his side. Fidessa reproached him for leaving her, and then sat down to talk gaily with him, and the hours passed in idle pleasantness. To quench his thirst the knight drank of the fountain by his side, and from some ill property in the water a sudden faintness overcame him. There as he sat in idle talk, faint and fearful, and without his armour, a sudden sound of terror filled the place, and a giant tall as three tall men and big to match strode toward the pair with steps that shook the ground. The knight had no time to put on his trusty armour; he made what fight he could, and skilfully escaped a stroke that would have slain him; but, anon, one buffet from the giant brought him to the earth in a dead swoon. And then the giant upheaved his heavy hand and would have slain him quite, but that Fidessa cried on him, 'O great Orgoglio, do not slay him for my sake; let him be

thy bond slave, and take me also to be thy servant.' The giant heard her prayer, and took her home to be the mistress of his castle, and carried with him too the senseless body of the poor knight, whom he made haste to throw with all his force into the depths of a loathsome dungeon.

Meantime the poor dwarf had watched his master's fall, and picking up his mighty armour and his silver shield, he laid them on the riderless steed, and went to tell his great distress to any good knight he might meet. And soon he chanced, not upon a knight, but upon the woful lady Una, who, when she saw the dwarf and his sad company, and heard his tidings, fell upon the ground in a deadly swoon; she came to herself only to weep and lament, and then again she fainted, and it was long before she was able to go on her sorrowful way.

At last she rose up resolving to find her knight alive or dead. Long she went through wood and waste, over hill and dale, and bitter storms did beat her tender body, and bitter grief did wound her soul.

After journeying long she chanced to meet a goodly knight clad from top to toe in glittering armour, and bearing, though covered from the sight, a shield made of one huge diamond of such awful brightness that by flashing it upon them he could dismay unequal armies of his foes.

He and his squire rode up to the sorrowful lady, and by kind and courteous speech he won from her the cause of all her woe; nor had she reason to regret her confidence, for he gave her his knightly word that he would never quit her until he had restored her captive knight.

"Ayem, how many perils do enfold
The righteous man, to make him daily fall,
Were not that heavenly grace doth him uphold,
And steadfast truth acquit him out of all.
Her love is firm, her care continual,
So oft as he through his own foolish pride
Or weakness is to sinful bands made thrall;
Else should this Redcross Knight in bonds have died,
For whose deliverance she this prince doth thither guide."

At last the knight and the lady came to a strong, high castle; and the dwarf cried, "Lo, that is where my luckless lord doth lie!" Thereupon the noble knight alighted from his steed, and bade the lady wait until she should learn the

end of the fight. The squire took a small buglehorn that hung at his side and blew a single blast, and, behold, the castle shook to its foundations, and every door flew open of its own accord. Then the giant staggered forth in haste to see what was amiss, and soon addressed him to the fight: such a tremendous blow did he heave, that, the knight stepping lightly aside, his huge club plunged deep into the ground and bent his own body with its force; of which his assailant took advantage, and struck off the left arm of the stooping giant; but, by and by, throwing double force into his remaining arm, he felled the knight with a blow that no strength could resist, and would have hastened to despatch him, but that the wondrous shield, uncovered in the fray, flashed blindness into the eyes of Orgoglio, who, stumbling and uncertain, fell a prey to the prowess of the knight.

Now when she saw that the breath was gone out of that great body, the lady Una came up to pay her modest thanks to the knight who had achieved this great victory for her, and to entreat him to find her captive lord. Then, with eager haste the knight entered the castle and searched high and low but found no living thing within its walls: until he came at last to an iron door, fast locked, to which he could find no key: but there was a little grating in the door through which he cried with all his might to know if any living soul were within. A hollow, dreary, murmuring voice made piteous answer, "O who is he that brings me hope of death, for which I have waited these three moons past, in baleful darkness!" Which when the champion heard, his heart was pierced with pity for the knight in plight so forlorn; and then, with furious force he tore down that iron door: he would go in, but no floor could his foot find, nothing but a steep descent, as dark as hell, from which filthy smells arose. But neither filth nor darkness could withhold his zeal, and after much toil and trouble he found means to lift that poor prisoner up: and what a woeful sight he was for light of day—his sad dull eyes sunk deep in hollow pits, his bare thin cheeks and empty sides and rawbone arms, more fit for a mouldering skeleton than for a living man!

But the horror of his looks did not frighten his lady, who ran to him with hasty joy, and then stopped to weep over his pale face and wasted strength. They talked a little over

the past, but the knight could not bear to think of the errors he had fallen into and the ills he had borne: so the two knights and fair Una stayed to rest and refresh themselves in the castle, where they found store of all that was dainty and rare; and his friends cheered the heart of the captive. But first it was a question what should be done with Fidessa, the evil woman who had brought all this mischief on the knight: she tried to escape, but they caught her and brought her back: should they let her live or die? "Let her live," said Una, "but take away her scarlet robe and let her flee." And when they had stripped off her glittering jewels and royal robes, they found she was not a beautiful princess at all, but a witch, a hateful, wrinkled, withered old hag. So she fled from the castle, and hid herself in the wilderness from the eyes of men.

Space fails to tell much more of the adventures of this pair: Fair Una brought her feeble knight to rest and gather strength in the quiet, sweet house of her ancient friend, Dame Holiness, whose gracious daughters, Charity, Faith and Hope gave him comfort and instruction; where Repentance brought him pains which were as wholesome physic, for they left him sound and well; where Contemplation, from his cell on the brow of a hill, brought him to the opening of a narrow steep lane, at the far end of which he caught sight of the turrets of the New Jerusalem glimmering in the distance, and of the bright figures of the saints who walked therein. And here his guide gave him great news—that he should himself one day walk amongst them, and should be held in dear memory evermore as "Saint George of merrie Englone."

But the great adventure on which he first set forth was yet to be achieved; so when he was duly rested, Una led him to the bounds of her father's domains: there was the brazen tower in which the ancient king and queen were held, and Una could see them walking on the battlements. Wherefore she encouraged her knight to be of good cheer and acquit himself well, for a battle was before him such as never knight had fought victoriously. As they talked, lo, there was the great dragon, stretched upon a hill side, and himself a hill for size, whose huge carcase covered acres of earth. No sooner did he spy the two than he hastened towards

them, half flying, half on foot, and the knight had only time to put his lady in safety ere the battle began. And what a battle! the blows of the knight fell harmless on the brazen scales which covered the monstrous beast, and his spear ever glanced aside, for no spot could he find between the scales for weapon to enter; and the furious beast, enraged at his long attack, raised horse and rider high in the air and flew with them for a space of many yards: then dropping them, the knight found quick a point his spear could pierce, and out gushed a great stream of black blood, enough to turn a water-wheel. Loudly the dragon brayed, unused to hurt, and all the fiercer, flew upon the knight, who was so spent and sore with wounds and toil that he longed for death to end the unequal fray. And then it happened that the knight, overthrown, fell into a well hard by, a well of life which had the power to renew man's worn out frame: out of the well he rose, drenched, but fresh and stronger for the fight than when he first began: and in this new strength, he heaved a single blow at the dragon's crested scalp that clave the skull asunder, and the great beast lay dead at the feet of the victorious knight.

The aged King looked forth upon the battle and could scarce believe it true that his foe was fallen. But Una came and presented her faithful knight to her parents, the long imprisoned King and Queen of Eden. Then were there great rejoicings, the maidens and the young men greeting the conqueror with music and flowers, the aged folk blessing him, and the little children gathering at his feet; for indeed he had wrought a great deliverance for all who dwelt in Eden.

And now fair Una came out of her bower to greet her knight, arrayed in glistening white of silver or of silk, which, no man could say: and as he gazed, he wondered at her beauty, exceeding all he had thought of her before: and the King and Queen, glad to requite the knight who had laboured for them, betrothed him to his love, the fair daughter who was heiress to their domains; and high festival was kept for many days in Eden because the Dragon was slain, and because the Princess Una was mated with a worthy lord.

[A bound copy of the "Fairie Queene" is offered to the boy or girl (not over 17) who sends the best interpretation of this allegory. To be sent to the Editor (House of Education, Ambleside), by the last day of October. Ed.]